

BOOK REVIEW

MICHAEL WINK AND BEN-ERIK VAN WYK. 2008. **Mind-Altering and Poisonous Plants of the World**. (ISBN-13 978-0-88192-952-2, hbk.). Timber Press Inc., 133 S.W. Second Avenue, Suite 450, Portland, Oregon 97204-3527, U.S.A. (**Orders:** www.timberpress.com, mail@timberpress.com, 800-327-5680, 503-227-3070 fax). \$49.95, 464 pp., color throughout, black/white illustrations, 6 5/8" × 9 1/2".

Mind-Altering and Poisonous Plants of the World is a fascinating book. Its subtitle—*A scientifically accurate guide to 1200 toxic and intoxicating plants*—is a perfect description of this delightful and useful book. Having given regular lectures on poisonous plants, I have found this book to be a valuable and reliable source of information on poisonous plants. Not only is this book for the botanist, but a variety of audiences would find it meaningful to own: farmers, ranchers, teachers, students, homeowners, gardeners, horticulturists, florists, botanists, chemists, medical and law enforcement personnel, health care professionals, parents, and anyone with a curiosity in the power of green plants.

It has been said, "Poisons, those subtle and silent weapons capable of destroying life mysteriously—secretly and without violence—have ever had a peculiar fascination for mankind." Poisons and poisonous plants certainly fascinated the authors, Wink and van Wyk; they have done a spectacular job in assimilating a vast amount of information into a practical and user friendly format. Beautiful but poisonous plants are often used as garden ornamentals, potted plants, even florist flowers, yet most people are unaware of the dangers posed by the toxins derived from them. *Mind-Altering and Poisonous Plants of the World* takes you on a journey through the historical and modern day uses of these toxic plants. The introduction is followed by the "guts" of the book, an alphabetical list of about 200 plants. In the authors' words, "About 200 of the most relevant poisonous and mind-altering plants are characterized by concise monographs. Essential facts about another 1000 species are provided in the 'Quick guide to poisonous and mind-altering plants' at the end of the book." Each poisonous plant monograph is organized in 12 sections: **1)** Name, **2)** plants with similar properties, **3)** plant characters, **4)** occurrence, **5)** classification, **6)** active ingredients, **7)** utilization, **8)** toxicity, **9)** symptoms, **10)** pharmacological effects, **11)** first aid, and **12)** systematics. Beautiful color photographs with critical information accompany each monograph.

Take note, accidental poisonings happen and therefore I was delighted to see a list of suggestions of how to avoid poisoning or to help poison center personnel in case of ingestion of a toxic plant. The Toxic Exposure Surveillance System data for 2006—from the American Association of Poison Control Centers' National Poison Data System—show plants accounted for 2.7% of the substances most frequently (64,236 cases) involved in human exposures. Sadly, deaths do occur. I looked throughout the book but couldn't find the nationwide Poison Help line number (1-800-222-1222). This toll-free number is available 24 hours a day and will connect you to the nearest poison center wherever you are calling from in the United States. In an emergency call 9-1-1. Increase your knowledge of toxic plants, know what to do in case of suspected poisoning, and discover the most important factor in poisoning prevention, plant identification, with this book. Plant names and accurately identifying plants have practical uses after all. Maybe you can help prevent an emergency or even save a life. In case of poisoning always consult a medical professional or qualified practitioner. *Mind-Altering and Poisonous Plants of the World* has a **Warning and Disclaimer** on the copyright page, but I think it is still a good investment at \$49.95.—Barney Lipscomb, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, Texas 76102-4025, U.S.A.